

CalPERS Health Care 101

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Segment: What You Should Know About Prescription Drugs
Guests: Ellen Severoni, and Debbie Naegle

Video Transcript

Narrator:

The skyrocketing costs of health care have become a national crisis in the past few years. Our government and health care providers are looking for solutions.

Narrator:

CalPERS has partnered with California Health Decisions, an independent, nonprofit organization, to develop our Healthcare 101 campaign. Together we will help our members use and manage their prescription drugs and be a part of the solution to this national crisis.

Bonnie:

Oh, hi Wayne, have a seat.

Wayne:

You don't have to tell me twice.

Bonnie:

What's the matter? You're not looking your usual self.

Wayne:

I don't know I just haven't felt that great lately.

Bonnie:

Oh, have you gone to see your doctor?

Wayne:

Sure have. She gave me a hard time about not taking my prescriptions correctly.

Bonnie:

Wayne, that's very good advice. With my diabetes and Fred's health problems, we have to be very careful about our prescriptions and how we take them.

Wayne:

I know I just haven't felt like dealing with it.

Bonnie:

Well you need to get yourself back in shape. I was hoping you'd join me in that 3K walk coming up next month.

Wayne:

Maybe I can.

Narrator:

Noncompliance can put your health at risk. If you are careless with your medicines, your condition may not improve, and may even get worse.

Narrator:

What is noncompliance? Noncompliance is:

- not filling a prescription initially
- not refilling a prescription when still needed
- taking a medication at the wrong time
- stopping a medication before its course is completed, without your physician's advice
- taking the wrong dose
- taking a medication incorrectly
- skipping doses and
- taking someone else's medication

Narrator:

The first and most important step in medication compliance is to educate yourself. This means knowing about the specific drugs you use, the conditions they're intended to treat and the expected effects.

Narrator:

Work towards a partnership with your physician so that they understand your treatment goals and can recommend the best options for you.

Narrator:

Don't be afraid to "bother" your doctor or pharmacist with your concerns or questions. If you find that a drug is difficult to take, or is causing unpleasant side effects, let your doctor know right away. There may be another way to treat your condition or symptom. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if a different drug or dosage would work.

Narrator:

The next time your physician prescribes a medication, use the checklist that's included with this video to make sure you completely understand everything you need to know about the drug.

Narrator:

And if you use the internet to find information about prescription medications, make sure you're aware of who wrote the material, the date the information was compiled and links to advertisements promoting a treatment or product.

Bonnie:

Come on Wayne. We're half way there!

Wayne:

Just give me a minute. I'm feeling better, but I still have a ways to go. You know yesterday I was looking at TV and I saw this commercial on an arthritis medication. It really seems like something that could really help. I mean, do you know anything about that? I know Fred's been having his problems.

Bonnie:

I think I know the one you're talking about. You should probably ask your doctor about that. You know as well as I do, those TV ads can be pretty convincing.

Wayne:

That's very true!

Bonnie:

You know a lot of times, Wayne, there's a generic version out there. And it can be a bit less expensive.

Wayne:

Generic. But are they as good as the name brand? You know I only want the best for this old body.

Bonnie:

You'd be surprised at some of the research I've read on generic medication, come on.

Wayne:

Really? Maybe I'll look into it.

Narrator:

All medicines have three names: brand, generic, and chemical. An example of a brand would be Bayer. The generic would be Aspirin, and the chemical name would be Acetylsalicylic acid. They are all aspirin. Every drug has a generic name to describe its chemical makeup. Manufacturers assign brand names to their products.

Ellen Severnoi:

Because generic drugs have to be tested and FDA-approved, they are, almost always, as safe and effective as the brand-name. They may have a different shape or color from the brand-name, but what's important is that the active drug is still the same. Generic drugs are much less expensive, but you're still getting the medication the doctor thinks you need. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to help you decide whether generic or brand name is best, or to report any side effects with any prescription medicine.

Narrator:

Before you're prescribed the new drug, it's important that you're aware of the prescription drugs or "formulary" that your health plan covers. This could save you money.

Each health plan has its own list, so depending on the formulary in your health plan, you may pay a different co-payment for brand name drugs depending on whether or not they're on the plans formulary.

Debbie Naegle:

Obviously you want the most effective drug for your condition, but you also want to pay the least amount of money that you can pay. So ask your physician to look at the formulary and remind your physician that all generics are considered formulary drugs.

Then see if a generic will work for your condition. If you have to get a non formulary drug remember that you're going to pay a very high co-payment and if you get a generic drug you're paying the lowest co-payment possible.

Narrator:

Another way to save money and your time is by getting your prescriptions through your health plans mail order service. If you're taking a maintenance medication for an on-going or chronic condition such as blood pressure the mail service pharmacy is safe, reliable and convenient. Having the peace of mind to know your prescriptions are there when you need them and re-filled accurately and timely is important.

Wayne:

Hi Bonnie!

Bonnie:

Oh hi!

Wayne:

How are you this fine morning?

Bonnie:

I'm doing pretty good. But, Fred's not having such a great week.

Wayne:

Oh no, what's the matter?

Bonnie:

We think he might be having some problems with his medications interacting.

Wayne:
How did you find that out?

Bonnie:
We talked to his doctor about it, they said we can either come in and check all of his medications, or we take them to our pharmacist and they can check his prescriptions to see if some of those might be causing problems.

Wayne:
Sounds like a good idea to me.

Bonnie:
It can't hurt. At our age we want to feel as good as we can!

Wayne:
Yes.

Narrator:
Many medications have effects besides the one desired or expected. The more medications you take, the greater the chance for them to overlap and cause problems. When you're taking more than one medication, even for different reasons, the medicines may stay in your system longer because the liver can't clear them out as fast, so they can "pile up" and cause more side effects, even adverse drug reactions. Adverse drug reactions cause hospitalizations and deaths every year.

Narrator:
To avoid unwanted medication side effects, and guard against taking medications that should not be combined, brown-bag it! Give your medicines a yearly check-up. Gather all your current medications, both prescription and non-prescription, and show them to your doctor or pharmacist. They can check for any expired medications and potential adverse interactions.

Narrator:
Tell your physician and pharmacist about herbs and dietary supplements you use. Some herbs and dietary supplements have unplanned effects and may interact with other drugs. What your doctor doesn't know about the over the counter medicines you use could hurt you.

Narrator:
When you notice any new symptom, ask your doctor right away if it might be related to any medicine you are taking.

Narrator:
Check drug interactions online. The Center for Drug Evaluation and Research has a complete listing of interaction information.

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Narrator:

Another way to prevent a medication error is to keep a list of your medications with you. Ask your physician or nurse practitioner to write the reason for the medication directly on the prescription.

Narrator:

Be sure you can read the prescription your physician has written.

Narrator:

And, if it is possible, use only one pharmacy for all your prescription medications so that all of your records are at one location. If you are using a mail order pharmacy, be sure to notify your local pharmacist of all the medicines you order.

Narrator:

For more helpful information, fact sheets, and downloadable forms, including a Personal Medical Data Sheet and Medication Record, visit the Healthcare 101 Campaign on our Web site at www.calpers.ca.gov.